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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON

(OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 326.

FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 30, 1895.

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 326.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 30, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"It is a bargain, monsieur—a bargain! The rent is a mere nothing," said the old *concierge*, as he threw open one of the shutters, and flooded the room with dusty sunshine.

The apartment was on the first floor, at the back of a small court numbered 59 of the Rue Neuve St. Augustin. No. 59—I give it fearlessly, since even its foundation-stones have long been swept away.

The tremulous eagerness of this good Casimir made me half suspect that he had not the remotest right to let the rooms at all. But he told a well varnished tale of an old proprietor who hated women, and who passed his life in search of a country so civilised as to do without them.

From this journey of desperation he returned now and then to restore his tired senses, and to gather courage for a new departure.

It was midsummer; I might keep the rooms until the autumn; not an hour longer, since the patron would then be likely to pounce down upon his possessions, unannounced, at any moment. Just now he was believed to be in Lapland.

When I moved in that very afternoon, a guilty feeling of intrusion overcame me. The place was so luxurious, so well ordered, so unlike the four walls of lodging for which one pays. In the library with its leather hangings the patron's books were upon the shelves, his portfolio and his paper-knife upon the table; the ink in the miniature helmet of blue steel was dry, it is true, but there lay the well-worn quill beside it.

"The room reveals the man," says the philosopher. Granting this, the patron was a man of taste and well-informed. I took down some of the books: here were superb bindings, old and new editions. Upon one fly-leaf his name was written—Marius Morizot—the hand clear and fine, like a woman's. All here was as if he had left it yesterday. What if the door were to open and admit him at the next moment?

Just then the door did open, but only Casimir came in, bringing firewood, for the sun had already left the little court in shadow, and then there was an unseasonable chill in the waning summer day. The old man wore a black skull-cap over his thin, grey hair, and a green baize apron that swathed him nearly to the ankles. He chattered about the fire as he made and lighted it, all the time holding under his arm the eternal feather duster, which appeared to be his badge of office.

"The patron has his treasures," I said, laying down my book.

Casimir looked at the shelves with a certain respect, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, but not there," he answered.

Thinking that he referred to the glittering objects of the saloon, I treated myself to a complacent smile.

"Not there," he repeated, shuffling towards me in his loose slippers, and letting his voice die away into the important whisper that is the emphasis of a French man-of-all-work, "Ah, if monsieur knew."

"Knew what?" I asked. "Have we a gold mine at our feet?"

He chuckled and nodded. "Better than that, monsieur. See!"

And he pushed aside one of the hangings, and showed me that it covered a door of burnished steel.

"A safe?"

"Yes, monsieur, in the wall."

"And of such size," I continued, for the doorway, though narrow, was higher than my head. "What can he keep there?"

"Jewels, monsieur," said Casimir, enjoying my surprise.

"Jewels from the ends of the earth, laid away in little drawers, lined with velvet as soft as the down of a bird. It is a passion with him; the collection is a property in itself."

I laid my hand gently upon the shining metal; it might have been the door of a tomb. I drew back shivering. The thought of these untold riches, hardly out of reach, disturbed me; I felt in a measure responsible for their safety.

"The door is locked, of course," said I.

"Oh, yes, monsieur: only the patron has the key." He brushed the door lightly with his feather tips, as though he were dealing with some fragile work of art, and then dropped the curtain over it.

"Casimir! You have your master's leave to let these rooms; you are sure?"

"Oh, certainly, monsieur. Monsieur need give himself no uneasiness; it is permitted at this season. In the summer-time the patron always absents himself. He has been nearly two years away."

I changed the subject, though I doubted him instinctively.

"What is Monsieur Morizot like?" I asked.

"A lamb, monsieur, amiable, as one cannot be more so. Monsieur, then, has not noticed his portrait?"

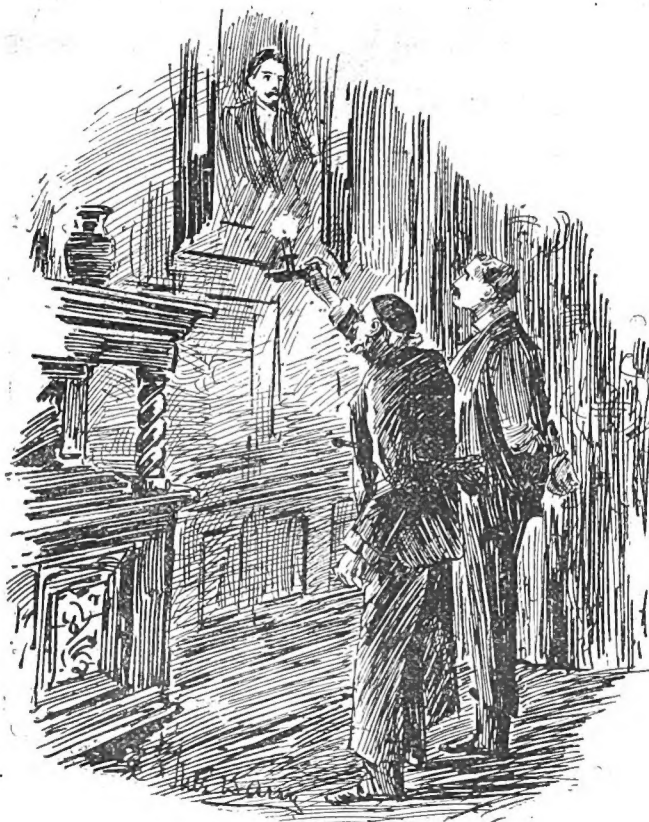
The pictures were chiefly modern, and were none too well lighted; I had barely glanced at them. Casimir led me to this one, which hung in a dark corner, so high that the flame of a candle held up at arm's length but just revealed it. The face was long, thin, sharp-featured and sallow, with the prevailing moustache and imperial of the time. But the eyes were fine and friendly. On the whole, I felt happier about Monsieur Morizot.

"And yet he hates women! Was he never married?"

"Never, monsieur; in youth he had a disappointment, they say, and now it would be somewhat late for him to think again of that. At his age one no longer makes such plans."

His hand shook more than ever, and the melted wax of the candle ran over, one drop falling upon the floor. "He is good, the patron," he murmured, so tenderly that the drop might have been a tear from his own failing eyes.

When the old retainer had left me I dismissed all scruples, and unpacked my trunk in the little chamber, singing to myself in the happiest of moods. I was in luck, evidently.



"He is good, the patron."

Even should Monsieur Morizot turn up, I felt sure that he would accept my explanation, supposing one to be necessary. But he would not come. I doubted Casimir no longer.

Later I pulled myself together and went to the Opera, stayed the performance out, and left the theatre somewhat damped in spirits. The sky was overcast; a drop or two of rain fell. The great doors of No. 59 were closed and locked, of course; at that hour I could have expected nothing else. But Casimir slept soundly; it was long before I could make him hear, though I pulled the bell till the whole place resounded.

The rain came on in earnest, and I was just about to despair, when the door gave a welcome click and swung back an inch or two. I stumbled in through the darkness, and passed the lodge, where I could hear Casimir swearing to himself drowsily, without a thought of challenging me; and guided myself by the hand-rail of the staircase straight to my own door. I struck a match, found the key, and went in.

The outer rooms were black and unfriendly; through them I saw a thread of light from the library door, to which I groped my way. The light came from a lamp that stood on the table, and I blessed Casimir for his forethought. But for the lamp the room, at the first glance, seemed to be as I left it. The carved chair was drawn up before the fire, which still burned brightly. That I found a fire and not a heap of ashes might have struck me as a curious circumstance, but I set this down to Casimir's forethought, too; all the more readily that my clothes were wet, and that I needed it to dry them, as I proceeded to do.

Standing thus before the chimney, with the crackling logs at my heels, I observed a book upon the table. It lay close to the arm of the great chair—so close, in fact, that one sitting there could hardly fail to see it, even in the twilight. Yet it had escaped my notice until now.

"What book?" The moment my unspoken question was answered, I felt absolutely sure that it had never before been in my hands. Its vellum covers were worn and moth-eaten;

its musty leaves were yellow with age. I read the title, "The Trial of François Ravailac for the Murder of King Henry IV., 1610." I could hardly have forgotten that book had I taken it down.

Immediately a strange terror seized me; vague, unreasoning it was—like a child in the dark. I dropped the book, caught up a candle, and peered into the chamber; then searched the other rooms throughout. I saw no one, heard no sound. I was alone. Yet this knowledge failed to reassure me. I spoke, and was startled at my own voice. I tried to sing, but the walls gave back a mocking echo that was unendurable. And I returned to the library with the same childish dread of nothing still oppressing me, like the remembrance of a nightmare.

I can recall distinctly my struggle to conquer this feeling, and I know that I must have conquered it, for I sat down in the arm-chair and began to read the trial of Ravailac:

"The prisoner is sworn, and asked his name, age, rank and place of abode.

"He said that his name was François Ravailac, born and dwelling at Angoulême, between thirty-one and thirty-two years of age."

I can see those lines now, in all their quaintness of type, as one makes a sun picture by a sudden closing of the eyes. I remember that I read on and on till I came to a page so stained as to be indistinct, part of which had been torn away. Then I must have fallen into a doze—a mere cat-nap of a moment only. I woke with a start, unable at first to recognise the surroundings.

The lamp had run down, after the provoking manner of French moderators. I knew that it only needed winding, and leaning over the table I gave the key a turn or two; but I was too late—the lamp went out in a long, smoky trail. Yet the room was not quite dark. The fire burned on, flickering at my feet, and making fantastic shadows on the glass.

I rose and looked in the glass, and grew dumb with horror. For I saw there the reflection of a man's face, so hideous in its expression that, even in a crowd, one would have turned from it with loathing. I have never been able to describe it; in that uncertain light it had no colour, I could barely trace its outline. But I should know that face, if I saw it at the top of the great pyramid, or in the plains of Arizona—anywhere, indeed, at once; and I should shudder at the sight, as I do now at the thought, like a frightened animal.

For a few seconds I was helpless. My muscles refused to act; I could not even turn my head to look behind me. Thus with all senses gone but one, I saw the face drawing nearer to my chair and looking down at it. The lines grew more distinct; a strange mark came out upon the cheek, as if the skin there had contracted. Then, with an effort that seemed like a trial of strength with some force unseen, I wheeled



I saw there the reflection of a man's face.

about the dark, silent spaces of the room, conscious only of a sudden draught of cold air that chilled me to the bone.

Darkness—there was nothing else. Yet I turned again to the glass, finding only my own figure, scarcely recognizable.

Then, for the first time, I was aware that my left hand, cold and damp, like a dead man's, still clasped the old book, marking my place, between its leaves. I shivered, and would have laid it down; but instead of that, I flung it from me into the fire with a shriek that set the room ringing. For the stain upon its torn page had deepened and freshened, and was oozing out upon my fingers. They were red with it. Kneeling at the hearth, I wiped away the drops with my handkerchief, and burned that, too.

Still on the hearth I crouched, and listened. If there were only something human to face and challenge! Not a sound. But again the current of cold air, as if from an open door or window. That, at least, was real. I found a candle, lighted it at the fire, and searched the room once more.

To my great surprise, I discovered in the darkest corner a small door I had never seen—one of those blind doors so common in French apartments, cunningly contrived to fit a panel of the wall. It stood ajar, moreover, as though forced open by some mischievous gust of the night wind that had lost its way in the house and then made a frantic effort to get out again.

Rejoiced to account so easily for one disturbing element at least, I pushed the door aside, and saw merely a narrow, flagged corridor, leading to a servants' stairway communicating with the ground floor. By the dim light I held, I could distinguish three steps leading down into awful darkness, like a murderous oubliette of the middle ages.

I strained my ears and listened. There was nothing more to be seen, but my ears caught a faint sound, startling at that hour; though by day I should have laughed at it—simply the noise of running water, gently falling, as if from a pipe, upon the pavement below. I went on cautiously to the stair-rail, leaned over it, and looked down. No one; but under the stairs, in the dark, the water went splashing on intermittently, as though it fell first upon invisible hands—washing them, perhaps. The thought suggested itself instantly.

"Who is there?" I shouted, lowering the light towards the dark corner, but in vain.

The water stopped. There was no other answer.

"Who is there?" I repeated, in a voice that was not mine.

I heard a shuffling step, and there came a blast of the night air strong enough to put out the light, if I had not drawn back, shielding the flame with my hand. A door below me quietly closed, and all was still again.

I rushed down the stairs and found the door. It was securely bolted; the bolts were rusted. I tried one, and could not stir it.

Then, out in the court, a harsh cry rang back along the walls, "Cordon!" the familiar call to the sleeping concierge. "Cordon!" the same rough voice repeated. The heavy street door fell into place with a dull, jarring sound. The presence, whatever it was, had escaped scot-free into the world of Paris.

Drip, drip, behind me I heard the water; falling now, drop by drop, upon the stones. There was nothing else to show that I had not been dreaming. I gave one searching look at

the dismal little corner, and then fled from it and from the house for ever.

In less time than it takes to tell it, I had rushed through the rooms overhead, and down again by the main staircase, out into the court, and on through the falling rain, shouting to Casimir as I went, "Cordon—cordon—cordon!" I woke echoes there that drove me half mad; I beat upon the door. At last the cord was drawn, and I found myself in the street, where I recovered my senses sufficiently to put on my hat and coat, snatched up in the flight mechanically from the table in the anti-chamber.

I went back to my hotel, and passed a sleepless night. In the morning, very early, I hurried out again, laughing at my folly. The day was fine and bright, as only Paris can be; and yet I trembled on turning into the court, where, however, I found nothing more terrible than Casimir watering his flowers and talking to a grey cat, that rubbed itself affectionately against his shins. The old man started when he saw me, and looked from me to the window, behind which he supposed I had been sleeping.

"Monsieur rises early," said he.

"Yes. I am called away. You will be kind enough to pack my trunk, and send it after me."

"Monsieur gives up the rooms?"

"Unavoidably. It does not matter, they are paid for all the same."

Surprise made him speechless for a moment. The cat came slowly towards me, purring. I stooped and stroked it between the ears.

"He is called Chambord, monsieur. He lives upon raw meat, but he is very kind and gentle. I regret that monsieur goes away."

"Thank you. Casimir, what strange man was in the house last night?"

"Monsieur, I do not understand. There was no one."

"You let no one out, then?"

"Oh, that, of course. The house has many apartments, many lodgers. I do not count them in my sleep."

"Nevertheless," I said with some warmth, "there was a stranger in my rooms last night. I saw him."

"Monsieur was dreaming. It is impossible."

"But I can describe him to you."

And I tried to do so, making only a stammering failure of it.

Casimir shrugged his shoulders.

Then I remembered the curious mark upon the man's cheek, and put in that evidence triumphantly.

The dull eyes opened a little wider, but he smiled and shook his head.

"Sapristi? Now I know that monsieur was surely dreaming. That is the Brazilian Cornelio, the good patron's valet de chambre."

"Well, then, I tell you, he has come back."

"But, monsieur—"

"I swear it to you."

"Impossible. Monsieur Morizot keeps him always at his side. They are both in Lapland."

I argued with him to no purpose. He grew angry, and, in his excitement, tipped over his watering-pot upon Chambord, who turned tail and disappeared. I could convince him of



"What strange man was in the house last night?"

nothing but my own imbecility; and so I left him muttering strange oaths among his flowers.

One rarely fails to recall a startling bit of his own experience, the first time its date comes round again. So it happened that this adventure was uppermost in my mind one midsummer night of the following year, on board the good steamer *Baron Osy*, bound from London to Antwerp.

One by one the passengers who were about me on the after-deck had gone below as the night breeze strengthened. I knew that the stars were coming out, that under the pale green streak of western sky the English coast was fast receding. But my thoughts were hundreds of miles away.

With them I was really strolling through the *Passage des Princes* and back along the Boulevard, humming as I walked, the doctor's air in "L'Ombre"; and so, on through the details of that troubled night. I lived again in Monsieur Morizot's apartment; I saw his chair at the fire, his book upon the table; nay, even the old letter-press danced before my eyes:—

"The prisoner is sworn: and asked his name, age, rank, and place of abode."

"He said that his name was François Ravailac, born and dwelling at Angoulême—"

The sound of my voice brought me back to the deck of the *Baron Osy*. I had spoken the words aloud. I turned, and saw that they must have been overheard by a passenger who stood at the rail, not ten feet away. He wore a close-fitting, pointed cap and a long dark coat, buttoned tightly under his chin, and these garments had a suggestive richness in them. A splendid jewel, too, shone upon his hand. But his eyes were fixed on me with a look in which fear and wonder mingled strangely; his face seemed white as death, and it was the face of the valet, Cornelio.

I realised an unknown power in the words which I had spoken; and, without moving from my place, I finished the broken sentence from the trial of Ravailac, then repeated it word for word from the beginning. With that, the mark upon his cheek quivered convulsively; he gave a wild cry, like some brute brought to bay, and with one appealing look, as if towards imaginary pursuers closing in upon him, he flung himself over the rail into the sea.

I rushed to the ship's side, as one of the hands, who had seen him jump, tore a life-preserver from the guards, and threw it in after him. We caught sight of an arm tossed up in the foaming wake far behind. A wave swept over it. The engines were stopped, and a boat lowered. After a long time it came back, bringing only the wet corks. The old grey sexton of the sea works quickly and well.

"We found his name registered upon the list—Ramon Quizas, renter of Rio. He had no companion, and his trunks were stowed somewhere on the quay at Antwerp. When I left the city they still remained there unclaimed."

Three years later, in one of the continental reading-rooms, I took up the *Figaro*, to divert myself. Between the last words of Madame X., and the announcement of a *fête* at Asnières, I found a line of reference to a matter familiar enough, as it

seemed, to all but casual readers—the division among the heirs-at-law of a handsome property—that of one Monsieur Morizot. The name, and the mysterious importance given it, roused my curiosity, and I wrote at once to a Parisian crony for fuller particulars. This was his answer:

"Have you retired from the world that you cease to read the news of it? We are worn out with details of the life and death of Monsieur Morizot. Pardon me if I recite them to you very briefly. The worthy man lived, *en garçon*, in one of those houses of the Rue Neuve St. Augustin, already condemned to make way for the new avenue, which will be a marvel. Like you, he was a traveller, and he often remained for years an absentee, staying away at last longer than the code allows. He became, to all intents and purposes, a dead man, and his heirs demanded to share his estate, and to break up his collection of jewels, known to be of great value. Man proposes! The safe was opened, but it had been rifled, *mon ami*. They found there, instead, the owner's body, stabbed through and through."

"The good soul had made a hard fight of it. His hand still clutched a bit of watch-chain, identified as the property of a certain Brazilian ape of a servant who never left him. Our police is enormously cunning. Bit by bit the case has been worked up, and this is what happened. The two arrived late one night at the Northern Railway station, where, to save time, at the servant's suggestion, their trunks were left to be claimed in the morning. Thus they installed themselves at home without stir, and unannounced. Then the man got the better of his master, and became in his turn an absentee."

"No one ever dreamed of the arrival or the departure, yet now it is all clear as though we saw it in a glass—the very date proved by the fragment of a journal found in the pocket of what was once Monsieur Morizot. Heed the warning, and travel no more, but marry, and let madame watch over you. Get thee a wife."

I answered my foreign correspondent in good English fashion, by asking a question. "Upon what date," I prayed him, "was the crime committed?" His reply brought me a printed slip, fixing upon the very night of my adventure, but in the year preceding it. And on this point all known records of the affair obstinately agree.

That Señor Ramon Quizas and the valet, Cornelio, were one and the same, I have no manner of doubt; but that he ever could have revisited the scene of his double crime is inconceivable. Whose face, then, appeared to me in the mirror? Whose hands were washed in the running water? Who, besides myself, clamoured there in the dark for release from his own haunting fears? Did I, by some strange coincidence, dream these things, one after another, in quick succession?

Or did the murderer leave behind him in his flight a ghostly presence, to play his hideous part out, time and time again; while the faithful glass of Venice reflected line for line, moment for moment? I cannot answer. But now, when I walk in the Avenue de l'Opéra, I am grateful even for that dullest of improvement's dull marches, sweeping, as it does, all memory but mine of my grim lodging from the face of the earth.





THE time was about a fortnight before Easter. There were not many travellers and I had a compartment in the early boat train to myself. My destination was Paris; my errand to convey from my father (a London jeweller and silversmith) to his agent in that city a very valuable brilliant ring.

"The diamonds in it are worth five hundred pounds if they are worth a penny," my father had said to me, "so I hope you will take special care of the ring, Ned, and neither lose it on the way nor allow yourself to be robbed of it."

I smiled a little superciliously as my father spoke. As if it were at all likely that I should either lose it or allow it to be stolen from me! I was just turned one-and-twenty; and my father had no right to speak to me as if I were still a boy.

I had got the ring in an inner pocket of my waistcoat, as I took care to assure myself from time to time. I had not seen it since my father put it into the little velvet-lined box in which it was still shut up. When I had finished my first cigar and had got through the morning news, the thought struck me that I might as well have another look at the ring. There could be no harm in that, you know.

I took the box out of its hiding-place and opened it. My eyes were dazzled as I looked. There lay the darling in its nest of purple velvet. Who could have resisted the pleasure of taking it out and trying it on? Certainly not I. I tried it. Had it been made for the third finger of my right hand it could not have fitted me better. It looked simply exquisite. Now I came to think of it, was there or could there be a safer hiding-place for the ring than my finger? I had only to keep my glove on and not a soul would know anything about it. It was far safer there than in my pocket.

In such a case, to hesitate was folly. I placed the ring on my finger and put the empty box back into my pocket. As I was alone there was no occasion to put my glove on just then, so I mused and smoked and watched the many-coloured rays of light that flashed from the brilliants, and wondered what great swell's finger the ring was destined to decorate. How I wished that I could call it mine!

A quarter of an hour later we were steaming slowly out of Dover Harbour. There were not more than a dozen passengers on deck. The day was cold and clear, with just enough sea on to make the voyage unpleasant for bad sailors.

Only two ladies were visible. One was a stout middle-aged person, who was eating and drinking nearly the whole way across, evidently an old salt. The other was—well, simply the most charming creature I had ever set eyes on. In point of fact, I could not keep my eyes off her. I passed her and repassed her as I paced the deck from end to end, and every time that I passed her I looked at her.

What lovely grey eyes! What superb yellow hair! But as for her complexion—it would need a poet to describe its wild rose tints. Once or twice her eyes met mine, just for a moment, and it struck me that they were full of a wistful sadness. So far as I could judge she was entirely alone.

We were about half-way across, when, as I passed her for the fiftieth time, she spoke:

"Would monsieur have the goodness to ask the steward to bring me a little cognac?"

She spoke in French. As the song says, her voice was low and sweet. I was too fluttered to answer her. I could only bow and grin, and make a bolt for the steward's den; of course, I took the cognac to her myself. You should have seen how prettily she thanked me. She sipped at it as a canary might do, if that bird were in the habit of drinking brandy.

"I hope that mademoiselle is somewhat revived?" I ventured to observe presently.

"Yes, very much revived, thanks to monsieur. But I am not mademoiselle, I am madame. I am a widow."

She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes as she spoke. How interesting—nay, how touching—was this simple confession! The wistful sorrow in her eyes was at once accounted for. Would that it had been my happy lot to comfort her.

There was a camp-stool close by. Presently I ventured to draw it a little nearer and to sit down on it, blushing at my temerity as I did so. She did not seem offended, and we were presently in the midst of an animated and interesting conversation.

There was no hauteur about madame; on the contrary, she was candour itself. She had only been three days with Sir Henry FitzEvans, who had charge of her late husband's interests in England.

She was now going back into seclusion, going back to the little cottage in which she had dwelt ever since her dear husband's death. She would not be able to go forward by the tidal train, she told me, having a business call to make in Calais. She would go by the evening train.

All this was told me with charming frankness. There was no reason why I should not wait, and go along with her by the evening train, if she would allow me to do so. When I threw out a hint to that effect, she offered no objection. She admitted at once that she was fond of society, and then she looked at me, and—well, I could almost have sworn that she blushed.

I had already told her that I was bound for Paris on a special errand for my father, but I had not said a word about the ring, nor had she even seen it. I had put on my gloves before leaving the train at Dover, and still wore them.

A little while longer, and we found ourselves at Calais. When we landed, madame admitted she was hungry, and that luncheon would be a desirable feature of the programme. Accordingly, while she went about her business, I took a *voiture*, and drove to the Hôtel Dessin. There, in the course of half an hour, madame joined me.

Now, one can't very well partake of luncheon in kid gloves. The question was, whether I should partake of mine with the ring on my finger, or whether I should put it carefully away in the box, and hide it out of sight. If you have any kind of knowledge of what human nature is at twenty-one, especially when there is a pretty woman in the case, you will know the decision I arrived at. Madame pecked a little at this and that; but hardly ate more than a sparrow might have done.

How swiftly the minutes seemed to fly! I could have lingered on in that cosy little room for a year. When the cloth was drawn and we were left to ourselves, with a bottle of hock on the table between us, somehow our chairs seemed to gravitate towards each other, or perhaps it was the stove that attracted us, for the afternoon was chilly. In any case, we found ourselves in closer proximity.

Then said madame, "Do you not smoke, monsieur?"

"Yes; considerably more than is good for me, I am afraid."

"Then smoke now. Oblige me. I like to see a gentleman smoke."

I rose in order to get my cigar-case out of the pocket of my overcoat. Madame laid her hand lightly on my arm—and what a charming hand it was!—"Monsieur, I am going to make a confession," she said. "I smoke too—*moi* cigarettes. I lived for many years in Spain, where nearly all the ladies smoke. You are not shocked, I hope, at the idea of a lady smoking cigarettes?"

"Shocked, madame!"

"No, of course not. You are too much a man of the world;

you are above such insular prejudices; *eh bien!* You shall smoke one of my cigarettes."

From the sachet by her side she drew an embroidered case, which she opened, and bade me choose a cigarette. I did so, and she took another. Then with her own fair fingers she struck an *allumette*, and held it while I lighted the weed. Then she lighted her own. She could not fail to see my ring as she lighted the match.

"I daresay you find the flavour a little peculiar," said madame, a minute or two later. "These cigarettes are made of perfumed tobacco; I never smoke any others. I hope you do not find yours disagreeable."

"On the contrary, madame. I am quite in love with it. As you say, the flavour is slightly peculiar, but aromatic and pleasant—very pleasant."

To tell the truth, I didn't like it at all, but I wouldn't have said so for worlds. We smoked on in silence. What would this superb creature say to me, I wondered, if I were to tell her how madly I had fallen in love with her? Would she reject me with scorn, or would she —

I gave a sudden start, and was shocked to find that I had been falling asleep. Fortunately, madame had not noticed me. Her large melancholy eyes were bent upon the stove. There was certainly something very soothing, something that inclined to slumber and happy dreams about madame.

Peculiar cigarettes! If I had but two thousand a year now, and this sweet creature to share it, how happy I could be! Certainly she must have been some six or seven years older than myself, but I never was one to care for your chits of schoolgirls, who set up for being women before they are out of their teens. Here was an angel who had been left desolate, who had been cast on a bleak and unfeeling world, who pined for a heart and a home—for a heart that brimmed over with love. Gracious goodness! I had a heart that yearned towards her—that—that—

Why—eh—how was this, and where was I? I awoke with a shiver. But for the lamp in the courtyard, the room would have been quite dark. My head was aching frightfully. I got up and staggered to the window. When I looked out and saw the familiar courtyard, everything came back to me like a flash of light.

Where was madame? Why had I slept so long? I groped for the bell and rang it violently. Up came the waiter with a

candle. "Where is madame?" I demanded. "Madame," he answered, "went out nearly three hours ago, saying that she wanted to make a few purchases, and would be back in a little time. On no account, she said, was her brother, who had suffered terribly from *mal de mer* in crossing, to be disturbed."

Gone three hours ago! Her brother! *Mal de mer!* What could it mean? As I sat down, utterly bewildered, my arm pressed against the little box in my pocket. Mechanically I glanced at my finger; the ring was no longer there. My heart turned sick within me. I sank down and buried my face in my hands. The waiter thought I was ill and ran to fetch some cognac. I saw it all now. Fool! fool that I was, I had allowed myself to be swindled by a common adventuress.

At nine o'clock next morning I stood before my father a miserable, haggard, woe-begone wretch. I told my tale, but as I did so I could not quite keep down my tears of mingled shame and vexation. He listened to me with a curious, cynical smile. When I had done he went to his bureau and opened a drawer.

"Set your mind at rest, Ned; here's the ring safe and sound."

I could only stare in astonishment.

"When madame, with the ring in her possession, left you asleep, she was just in time to catch the afternoon boat back to Dover. The ring was in my hands again before ten o'clock last night."

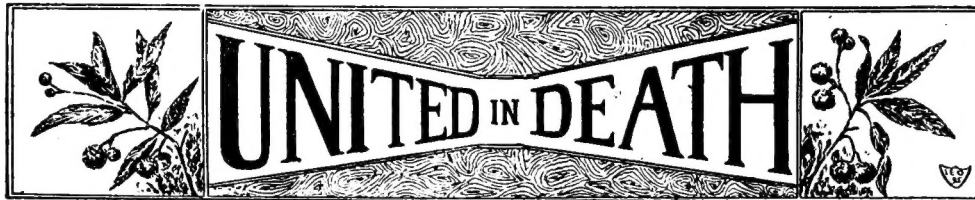
"But—but," I stammered. "I don't understand. When she had once got the ring in her possession, why did she bring it back to you?"

"Because she was paid to do so; because she was hired through the agency of a private inquiry office to act as she did. Madame, by profession, is not a thief, but a thief-taker. You had grown so conceited of late, Master Ned, I thought it would do you no harm to take you down a peg or two. If you profit by the lesson my money will have been well spent."

An hour or two later I said, "But wasn't it rather a risky thing to do with a ring worth five hundred pounds?"

My father winked at me with the solemnity of a judge.

"My dear Ned, what do you take your old father for? The diamonds were nothing but paste!"



It was three o'clock of a hot, drowsy afternoon in Santiago, Santo Domingo. All the town, recently awakened from its accustomed siesta, was bestirring itself and going about its usual occupations. From the billiard room over the way came the click of the balls, mingled with the monotonous "*Uno, dos, veinto-seis,*" of the loto players.

Pedro, the son of the man who kept the billiard-room, sat outside the door, his chair tipped back and resting on two legs. He was thrumming on his guitar and humming a song, the burden of which was "*Te amo, te adoro, mi querida*" (I love thee, I adore thee, my darling).

The water boys, fresh from their afternoon dip in the river, their four bright tins brimming full, went galloping by, mercilessly digging and pounding the poor burros with their heels. Lucky the boy who had an old spur tied to his bare foot; the less fortunate ones had to content themselves with a good bit of *maya* (century plant), with points an inch long, projecting on either side, with which to prod the poor beasts. They droned their sing-song, "*Aqua, aqua, quatre por*

un medio" (Water, water, four tins for twopence half-penny).

It was hot and still inside the *patio*, the tropical sun beating fiercely down, but in the sheltered verandah it was cool. In a Creole hammock a young woman lay, looking, with wide-open eyes, across the courtyard, where the lime-trees, laden with fragrant blossoms, green and ripe fruit, bent their branches almost to the ground. The lizards darted up and down, snapping, like a flash, at some tiny insect; now ashy white as they crawled on the wall, or black with anger in a sudden contest over a fly.

Just beneath the sour-orange tree, with its russet-brown fruit glimmering through the shining leaves, a pomegranate tree stretched its slender branches up, as if to cling to the stronger tree for support, but the heavy, scarlet, waxen blossoms caused it to sway backwards and forwards.

There was a tap at the door.

"*La madama quiere dulce?*" (Does madam wish for sweets?) asked a sweet, plaintive voice.

Then came the slip-slap of Creole slippers on the brick floor of the *porton*.

"Come in, Martina," called out Mrs. Burton, in reply.

A tall, striking-looking girl came into the *patio* and walked towards the verandah. A little of the Indian could be traced in the high cheek-bones and the straight, glossy braids of blue-black hair; the negro showed itself in the soft, sad eyes; and the Spanish in the erect and free step. With all that mixture she was a beautiful creature.

She wore a simple gown of unbleached linen, which hung loosely from throat to foot. A deep-red hybiscus flower was thrust over the left ear.

She went towards Mrs. Burton, balancing on her head the large, square wooden tray, heaped high with golden squares of orange *dulce*, white blocks of fresh cocoanut sweets, clear, wine-coloured slabs of guava jelly, in neat, white paper cases, and the amber-coloured *dulce leche*.

"I have just been wishing for some of your *dulce*," said Mrs. Burton, a slender, dark-haired English girl. "Sit down, and let me pick out what I want."

Martina knelt down beside the hammock, holding up the tray for her to make a selection. Mrs. Burton chose a goodly pile, for she was childishly fond of sweets, and fumbled in her pocket for her purse, from which she selected several *reals*, and dropped them into the slender, well-shaped, olive-tinted hand which Martina held out for the money.

She put the tray down on the floor of the verandah, leaned against the brick-plastered wall of the house, clasped her hands about her knees, and looked up expectantly at Mrs. Burton, half-hesitated, then began:

"Ay, Doña Juanita."

"Well, Martina," said Mrs. Burton, smiling encouragingly, "you have something to tell me, I know. We are all alone here, and it's a good time to talk."

Thus urged, Martina went on, the colour rising in her cheeks as she talked.

"Doña Juanita, I have a *novio*."

"You, Martina!" exclaimed Mrs. Burton, in surprise, for Martina had always before sedulously avoided the young men, and had reached the age of twenty without having had a lover.

"Yes, it is true," returned the girl shyly. "I have never felt love before; but, when it comes, who can withstand it? But perhaps you know, madama?" she asked, glancing quickly up at the older woman, who nodded in return.

"They say," she continued, "that the people of the great *Extrangero* are colder than we; but you are *simpatico*, and must have loved. Stupid that I am! there is your *marido*, the señor. Pardon me, madama."

"But let me hear your story, Martina; tell me about the wonderful *novio*. Is he handsome?"

"Ah, yes, madama; handsome, brave, tall, generous. He is a soldier—one of the President's bodyguard. He has land, too, and a fine *bohio*. I first saw him two weeks ago, when the President was here. As the troops went by, Pablo looked up and smiled at me. I felt my heart go out to him. I met him at the park that evening, and since then I have seen him every day; and, oh, madama, he wishes to marry me. You will come to the wedding, won't you? There'll be wine and *dulce*; and Pablo has already sent to Puerto Plata to buy a gown of white muslin, and satin shoes for me. Are the *novios* of the *Extrangero* as kind as that?"

"Well, no," answered Mrs. Burton, "they are not so generous in that way; besides, it is not the custom. The bride has to provide her own clothes."

"*La pobre*," sighed Martina sympathetically. "I could not rest until I had told you," she added, as she lifted the tray to her head and prepared to go. A moment later the gate closed with a click.

Some six months later, Mrs. Burton, who had made a round of afternoon visits, and had just stepped up on her own pavement, her dainty muslin skirt held up with one hand, and her white silk sunshade in the other, fancied she heard a sound of subdued sobbing. She looked about, but saw no one; then she unhooked the gate. There, in one corner, close to the great door, crouched a woman, her head bent over her knees,

sobbing at intervals, as if she was almost exhausted with the effort.

As Mrs. Burton entered, the woman lifted a drawn, haggard face, so changed from the bright, laughing one of the summer before, that she hardly recognised Martina.

"Why! can that be you, Martina?" she exclaimed in surprise. "What is the matter with you?" With difficulty she persuaded the girl to rise, and half dragged her across the *porton* into the cool *sala*, where she made her lie down on a bamboo couch, then ran to the dining-room for a glass of wine, which she forced Martina to sip. She waited quietly for a few moments until Martina had somewhat regained her composure, then she said gently:

"Tell me about it, my dear."

Martina suddenly threw off the limp black mantilla that had covered her head and shoulders, and sat up.

"God knows, madama, that I am a wicked woman. I have told the padre. It does no good. When I saw you last I was to have been married, but the troops were ordered off to Monte Christi—there was a revolution on the line. I followed as close as I could, and saw Pablo nearly every day. I kept a little shop in Monte Christi. Well, one day, not long ago, that ashy-faced Rositar Ramirez—she who has the evil eye—looked at Pablo, and took him from me. They both left the place. He has since said he was true to me; but I would not believe him, I was desperate.

"One night I went across the line into Haiti, to a little village where old Jacques, the *guaguna* man lived, and asked for something to bring back my Pablo. Old Jacques said: 'There is no remedy but to have him killed; he is gone from you. Bring me some pure gold and he will trouble you no more.' I took the gold to him, and now, madama"—with a wild burst of tears—"he has been found guilty of a conspiracy against the life of the President, and will be shot here, in Santiago, to-morrow at sunset. There is no help. He was *guagunad*—that made him do it."

"My poor girl," said Mrs. Burton, softly stroking the girl's hand, "I'll ask my husband; perhaps he can see the President and intercede for Pablo."

Just then Mr. Burton came in. Martina fled out of one door as he entered the other.

"Hullo, what's up?" he asked.

His wife eagerly related the case in full, confident of his assistance.

"I'm afraid nothing can be done," said Mr. Burton; "he has no wealthy relatives. I'm sorry," he added, relaxing his somewhat self-assertive manner at the sight of his wife's distressed face, "but really, dear, I can do nothing. Come," he said, lighting a cigar, "let's go for a walk before dinner. We'll run over to the Benois'."

The next day a band of twenty soldiers slowly filed down towards the cemetery. In front walked a young man, with his arms bound behind him. There was an expression of stern resignation on his well cut features, and he held his head erect. On either side walked an armed soldier. A rabble of town folk straggled along behind. Low mutterings and an occasional sob could be heard.

The men entered the gates of the cemetery; then they turned to the right, where there was a freshly-dug grave in that part of the cemetery set apart for murderers, thieves and conspirators. Pablo was placed at the foot of the grave. The soldiers drew up in line with their rifles stiffly held upright.

The condemned man opened his lips.

"Compadre Felipe," he said to the soldier at the end of the line, "before God, I am innocent of all conspiracy. I have been denied a trial in this country—a republic—tell Martina Fernandez that I was true to her."

"One, two," sounded slowly, as the men raised their Remingtons, and as the "three" came, there was a swift, rushing movement from a tomb near by. A woman flung herself upon Pablo, and fell backwards into the grave with him.

"*Por Dios!*" exclaimed the men in horror.

As the smoke cleared Felipe went forward and raised Martina, shot through the head, from the shallow grave, where Pablo lay dead beneath her.



By JOHN K LEYS, Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c., &c.—Illustrated by RAYMOND POTTER.

SUMMARY.

Geoffrey Dundas, whose life is attempted on the 10th of June, 1833, by a Hindoo barrister at the Law Courts, by means of poison, pays a visit to General Sir Arthur Chetwynd at Seacombe Towers, in May, 1834. There the General takes Geoffrey into his confidence, and explains that a serious danger threatens the household, and that it will come, if at all, on the Tenth of June.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENERAL'S STORY.

Geoffrey started; his hand, holding a match with which he was about to light his pipe, remained suspended in the air; he forgot that he had been about to smoke, and quietly laid his pipe down on the table.

The General noticed the young man's agitation, and noticed, too, how he mastered it.

"You seem surprised at my mentioning that date," said Sir Arthur.

"Surprised? No. And yet—yes, General, and I don't know why I should conceal it from you—your speaking of that particular day did seem strange to me. The reason is, that a very curious thing happened to me on the tenth day of June last year. I suddenly, and for no apparent cause, became ill; and I believe I was poisoned by a Hindoo who was a perfect stranger to me. As if to place the matter beyond a doubt this odd letter was delivered at my chambers next morning—"

He took out his pocket-book, and, after searching a little, produced the sheet of paper he spoke of and handed it to his host.

The General's hand did not tremble, but Geoffrey, looking at him, saw that his face turned perceptibly paler as he read the few brief lines.

"Do you understand this?" he asked, as he handed back the letter.

"I had it translated to me; but I have no idea what it refers to. I can only imagine that I am in some way held responsible for something that occurred in Bengal before I was born."

"True—before you were born. Yet the sins of the fathers—God forbid!"

Sir Arthur threw his unlighted cigar on the table, and began to pace the room with long, rapid strides.

"You shall know all about it, Geoffrey," he said suddenly; "you have a right to know."

He continued to march to the end of the room and back again all the time he was speaking, while Geoffrey sat in his chair quietly watching him.

"It was in the days of the Mutiny," he said, "that your father and I first became acquainted. That was in fifty-two. There was wild work doing in those days, I can tell you. They are half-forgotten now, except by a few old fellows like myself—just as well perhaps. The suddenness, the diabolical treachery of the outbreak were enough to make one lose one's head; and then when one realised the extent of the rising, and the length of time that must elapse before help could arrive from home—it was frightful, I tell you.

"You have no idea of it. You have no idea, either, what it is to talk to men who have seen their wives murdered, their little children—bah! It is enough to say that for weeks our peril was extreme; we lived in a perpetual fever; and when at last we got the upper hand, and orders were given to crush out the smouldering embers of the revolt, we were in no mood to show mercy. I say this, not to justify, or even to excuse, but to explain what follows.

"In the month of May, Eighteen Fifty-three, parts of two regiments, with a small detachment of artillery, were sent to reduce the town of Churruckpore, still held by a rebel force. The job gave us more trouble than we had expected; and we lost a good many in the final charge. This infuriated our men; and when we got inside the place—well if an historian were to say that the town was sacked he wouldn't err very far from the truth. At any rate we lost control of the men—perhaps we didn't try as hard as we might have done to keep it—and there was looting, fire raising, and general wantonness going on for the best part of three days.

"Now I must tell you that inside the outer wall of the city, but surrounded by palisades and walls of its own, stood a temple of some Hindoo deity. The place was a favourite resort of pilgrims, who had enriched it with all manner of precious things—cloth of gold, caskets of ivory and sandal-wood, cups and plates of beaten gold, and especially gems. One idol, I remember, was well-nigh covered with strings of pearls; another was clothed in a vestment that was simply stiff and blazing with jewels—and so on. Anyhow, Major Panton of the Sixty-third, as it was then, with Captain Druce of the Artillery, your poor father and I—we four, determined to pay a visit to this temple."

"You didn't mean to st—to take those jewels and keep them?" interjected the listener.

"A lot of fighting men ranged inside the palisade."



"I rather think we did," said the General drily. "And let me tell you, young man, that if you expect men to go through what we went through at a pay of three or four rupees a day, and not help themselves when something good comes in their way, you expect a little too much of human nature. You must remember, however, that this was not exactly private property. In our eyes it belonged to nobody in particular. And, to say a great deal in two words, up to that time we had been living under the rule of John Company.

"Well, we took a dozen men whom we could trust, and proceeded to the temple about two hours before sundown. It was the tenth of June, Eighteen Fifty-three.

"The priests must have got notice of our coming, for they had a lot of fighting men ranged inside the palisade, close to the main entrance; and, as we were demanding admittance, they deliberately potted us! It's a wonder any of us escaped with our lives. There was nothing for it but to go back and get reinforcements. This was not so easy, as most of our fellows were drunk, and the rest were under no sort of discipline; so we were compelled to take two more, Grey of the Eighty-ninth, and Crawford, one of the surgeons, into our confidence. We got together about fifty men, and went for the place again.

"It was getting near dark as we got up to the palisade. This time we proceeded cautiously; but the enemy had vanished. There was not a soul to oppose our entrance; we went on in column of fours right up a broad avenue that led to the temple.

"As we grounded arms, a strange sound fell on our ears. It was a sort of wailing chant—not the sort of thing I could describe to you; but it was *erie*, and outlandish, and mournful to the last degree.

"Leaving the bulk of the men outside, we six officers went into the temple. It was a strange sight. The great space was lighted up by hundreds of tapers, so that there was no glare, only a mild soft radiance.

"Right in front was an altar, and towering above it something which I supposed was an idol—the ugliest, most repulsive object my eyes ever beheld. All the treasures of the shrine, it seemed to me, were exposed on and about the altar, and round it were ranged about a score of priests—Brahmins, I suppose—each with a single robe thrown round his body. They were chanting alternately, right answering left, just as they do in our own churches; and at stated intervals they they would unite in that horrid, low, wailing sound—I fancy I can hear it now.

"For some minutes we stood looking on in silence. At last Panton, who acted as our leader, lost patience, and called out something, I forget what—something to the effect that they had better be off. At the sound of his voice one priest stood up, and remained standing in his place while the chant proceeded for a few words; then a second rose and joined him; after a few moments a third, then a fourth, until all were on their feet. Suddenly, in the midst of the chorus, or part in which they all joined, the whole body of priests prostrated themselves before the idol. Then slowly they rose, turned, and marched in a long, thin, dark line beyond the altar, and so left the temple. Not a man of them stretched out a hand to the precious stones, images of gold, and jewelled weapons that were hung on the pedestal of the idol, or lying on the altar. They went out slowly, each with his eyes on the ground, each chanting the mournful burden. It seemed to me as if they meant it for the last service that would ever be rendered to their god to the end of time.

"The sound of the chant died away; and two seconds later we were rushing pell-mell on the treasure. We were, in fact, too eager; for we left no guard at the door, and the men outside, knowing perfectly well that they were not on duty, but engaged in an unlawful errand, and hearing the sound of our footsteps as we ran through the empty temple, came pouring in through the main entrance to see what was going forward. Of course, the sight of the gold and jewels was too much for them. Every man-jack of them came racing up to the great image; when, suddenly, without the slightest warning, a hundred flashes of fire came, as it were, through the wall, with a deafening roar of musketry; and in one instant a score of us lay dead or dying!"

The General stopped for a minute or two, as if the awful picture his memory had conjured up had silenced him. Geoffrey said not a word. When Sir Arthur again began to speak his voice was low and hoarse from suppressed emotion.

"Of what followed I can only tell you this.

We got our wounded out of the accursed place somehow or other, and then set fire to the temple. By the morning light the whole place was a heap of smoking ruins. Many of the priests and attendants were shot by our soldiers, in trying to escape; many were suffocated in the smoke or perished in the flames. But some escaped, I fancy by a subterranean passage—or if not, their co-religionists have known how to avenge them. Geoffrey—!"

The old man walked up to his guest and gripped him by the arm.

"Geoffrey!

Every year from that day, on the tenth of June, the anniversary of the destruction of the temple has been marked by the death of some one who took part in that

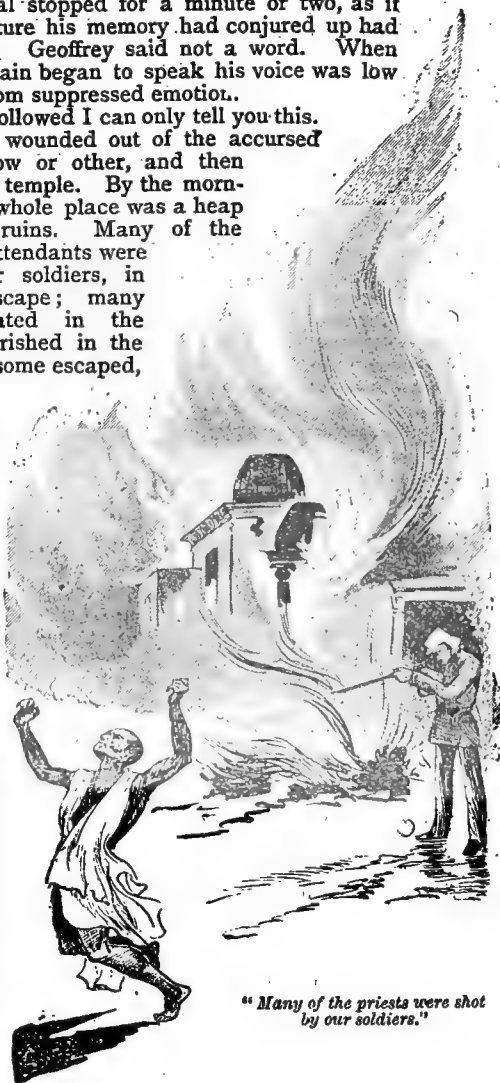
destruction, or some member of one of their families! Such, at least, is my conviction. I believe they mean to exterminate not only the survivors of the attack they made on us in the temple, but our children."

The young man made an exclamation of horror and incredulity.

"Listen." I have ascertained that several of the soldiers died on the tenth of June, some in fight, some in sickness, one or two evidently murdered by an unknown hand. But it was impossible to trace more than a certain number of the privates, because we could not be sure who actually were there.

"We knew the officers, however—Panton, Druce, Grey, Crawford, your father, and myself. Panton died of cholera before the year was out; but his son—a fine young fellow of five-and-twenty—was drowned while bathing (as it was supposed) on the tenth of June, four years later. Crawford's horse threw him, and he broke his neck. That was on the tenth of June. His sister died, I remember, on board ship on her way home. And I ascertained that *she*, too, ceased to live on the same fatal day.

"I cannot go on with the list. Some, of course, came by their deaths naturally, at different times of the year. But what puts the fact of the vendetta beyond a doubt is this: Several times, to my knowledge, a letter exactly similar to the one you have just showed me has been received by the surviving relatives. Some disregarded it; others thought it



"Many of the priests were shot by our soldiers."

pointed to an old grievance of a private nature. But your father and I long ago made up our minds that we were marked men. Your poor father himself died on the tenth of June."

"But that was in Afghanistan, fighting with men of a different race altogether!" cried Geoffrey.

"True; but how are we to know whose hand fired the shot that killed him? I heard, long afterwards, that the colonel who succeeded him in the command of his old regiment received one of those mysterious letters on the eleventh of June, though the regiment was in Calcutta, and your father was killed in Afghanistan!"

Geoffrey shuddered, and bent his head down on his hands.

"The question is, What are we to do?" said the General, once more beginning to walk up and down the room.

"Do! We can do nothing. Who can guard himself against an unseen enemy, who may strike now, or delay for years?"

"Don't say that. We can do something! I am certain that I have preserved my own life and my daughter's —."

"Your daughter! Miss Chetwynd! She cannot be in danger."

"But she is—or would be if I were not here to guard her. My life is, of course, the first object. I did not dream that yours would be attempted before mine or I would have warned you."

"It would have been of no use," said the young man moodily.

"Wouldn't it? You were saved by an accident. The avengers were balked for once. But it was only an accident. If you had known what to expect you might have shut yourself up in your room, and set them at defiance."

Geoffrey was astonished at the pluck shown by the veteran soldier. Far from being overwhelmed by the fatalistic dread that the terrible vengeance of the Hindoos was calculated to inspire, he had set himself to overcome it. His spirit was not crushed nor likely to be crushed. As he stood there, upright and bold, his eyes flashing fire, as if he were about to lead a regiment into action, Geoffrey thought he understood how it was that a few thousand Englishmen had conquered India.

"It is time for us to be off to bed," said Sir Arthur, looking at his watch; "but I may tell you this for your comfort before you go: my chief hope is that the vendetta will die out with the men who first conceived it. I can easily imagine a set of fanatic priests conceiving and carrying out a scheme of vengeance that was to include the whole race of their enemies, and that would require many years for its accomplishment; but I do not believe it possible that they could inspire their successors with the same ferocity of purpose. It is not in human nature that they should. And India is not what it was thirty years ago. The power of the Brahmans has visibly declined since the Mutiny."

"So I hope that we—or at least you and Leila, will outlive these murderers. After all, why shouldn't we? It is only

taking special precautions at a particular time of the year. This year, however, I have a special cause—it may be a mistaken one—for alarm, and special need of your help."

"I am yours, sir, to the last drop of my blood!" cried Geoffrey, starting to his feet, and holding out his hand.

"I am sure of it, my boy;" and Sir Arthur took the offered hand and shook it warmly. "And now, good night. Perhaps the incident from which I apprehend danger may not happen. If it does, you may be sure I shall make use of you if I can."

The two men parted without another word.

CHAPTER III.

GEOFFREY'S RIVAL.

It was the afternoon of the day on which Captain Byngham was to arrive. The General had gone to the station to fetch him; Miss Frewin was sitting at her wool-work in a corner of the drawing-room, and Geoffrey and Leila were seated by the window, awaiting the advent of the new guest.

"You and my cousin have met before, haven't you?" asked the girl.

"Yes; once here and once in London."

"I am so glad you know each other. It will be so pleasant for you to have a companion, and nice for him at the same time. I'm sure you'll get on well together."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Geoffrey refrained from bursting into a laugh. He looked at her, but she seemed perfectly serious.

"I'm afraid Captain Byngham and I have not much in common," he said drily.

"Oh! perhaps you don't like him?"

"Our tastes are different; so are our occupations."

"Yes; but you might be good friends for all that. You seem annoyed, depressed—I should say bored, at the idea of his coming."

"Well, it is only natural."

"Natural! Why?"

Surely the spirit of coquetry, which they

say is inborn in every woman, prompted the question. But Geoffrey replied to it quickly enough.

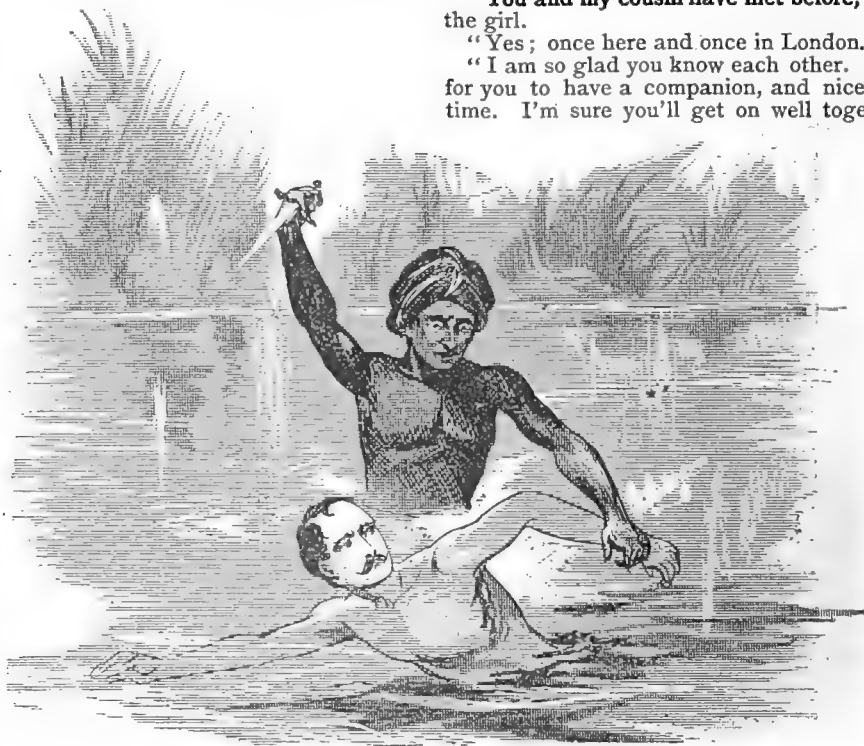
"Why? Because he will naturally have the lion's share of your society. Miss Frewin and I will be a great deal 'thrown together,' I expect, during the next ten days. As for my intercourse with you, if I get 'good morning' at breakfast, 'please pass the salt' at lunch, and —"

"Don't talk such nonsense," said Leila, blushing as she spoke.

"It isn't nonsense at all—but here is the dog-cart."

The dog-cart swept up the avenue at that moment, and Leila went out into the porch to meet her cousin, Geoffrey following her a little way behind.

Sir Arthur's cousin was a few years on the wrong side of thirty, but, like most men of fair complexion, he looked younger than he was. In appearance he was short, and decidedly stout, with thick limbs, fat podgy hands, and a bull neck. His eyes were of a light-blue, large, and rather prominent. His closely-cropped hair was fair, one might say reddish; his moustache was arranged after the approved pattern of the day.



"His son was drowned while bathing."



"Fighting with men of a different race."

have met Mr. Dundas before," Captain Byngham took care to show that he did not by any means consider the young barrister his equal. Calmly applying his glass to his right eye, he regarded his fellow guest in silence for a second, and then saying—"Ah! Think I have. How d'ye do?" he slowly extended his hand.

Geoffrey did not refuse to take the offered hand, though it cost him a little internal struggle to do so. He took care to be polite; and he considered that no more was required of him.

From that hour Geoffrey kept a good deal in the background.

He foresaw that if he were to insist on his rights as a guest, and try to secure a fair share of Miss Chetwynd's society, he must live in a state of perpetual rivalry and ill-will with Captain Byngham—a rivalry and ill-will which might at any time culminate in an open rupture. Apart from the awkwardness of carrying on a struggle of a personal nature with his host's nephew, Geoffrey felt that such a contest would be beneath him. His pride would not allow him to push himself forward where he might not be wanted; and he told himself again and again that if Leila preferred the society of a man like Captain Byngham, he would be the last man in the world to interfere with her choice.

But this did not prevent him from suffering a jealous pang, as every morning after breakfast he saw Byngham stroll up to his cousin with—"What shall we do to-day, Leila?" as if there were no one in the world to consider but themselves. The mere fact that the Captain called Leila by her Christian name—a privilege to which as a relation he was fairly entitled—was most distasteful to Geoffrey; but still more obnoxious to him was the air of protectorship which Byngham assumed towards his young hostess—a manner which seemed to say, "You are really very pretty and amusing, my dear coz; and since I have nothing better to do, I don't at all mind playing with you."

It was hard for Geoffrey to see them go off together under the feeble chaperonage of Miss Frewin, or with only a groom for escort, while he had to be content with the society of the General, or betake himself to the library. If it had not been for what Sir Arthur had said to him in the smoking-room, he would at once have returned to London, even although he knew very well that to end his visit abruptly for no ostensible

In spite of his stoutness Byngham was strong and active in his habits. He jumped down from the high dog-cart as lightly as Geoffrey could have done, stepped

up to Leila with a jaunty "How are you, coz?" and kissed her. He then turned round and helped the General to alight, chatting with Leila all the time.

A minute or two passed before anyone remembered Geoffrey; and when the General said, "I think you

reason would only be playing into Captain Byngham's hands.

Nor could Geoffrey avoid thinking that Leila might have managed differently. He felt that he had cause to complain of her treatment of him; and when, one morning, she asked him whether he would not join Captain Byngham and herself in their ride, he declined, offering but a very flimsy excuse. He thought the girl flushed as she turned away from him, and he was glad to think that he had at last made her see that he was not insensible to the treatment he was receiving.

He expected to see her ride off with her cousin a few minutes later, a groom following at a respectful distance in the rear; and he was surprised to see, shortly afterwards, three figures cantering down the avenue, one of them being that of Sir Arthur himself.

"Can it be," Geoffrey asked himself, "that the continual companionship of Byngham is really distasteful to her—that she is glad to get anyone to accompany them and prevent her being alone with him?" It almost looked like it; and the mere suspicion that it might be so was sufficient to restore Geoffrey to his usual good spirits. He went and had a dip in the sea, then took a walk, and managed to get a little reading done before the riding party returned.

They all met, of course, at luncheon; and Geoffrey thought that Captain Byngham looked rather surlier than usual. Leila was in good spirits; but Geoffrey



"How are you, coz?"



Nice, frank, ladylike girls.

noticed that she addressed her conversation exclusively to her father and her cousin.

"Papa," said Leila, when the meal was almost over, "don't you think it would be a good thing to ask Emily and Jane Stoddart to pay us a visit just now?"

"Do you really mean it, my dear?" inquired the General, frowning a little.

"Yes, papa. I feel that we ought to invite them sometimes when we are not alone. Besides, they will help to entertain the Rajah."

"Oh, very well; have them by all means," said Sir Arthur. "The Misses Stoddart," he continued, turning to Geoffrey, "are the daughters of a half-pay lieutenant of the Royal Navy, a fine old fellow who lives a few miles along the coast. Nothing would induce him to sleep out of his own house; but he is willing to spare us two of his daughters occasionally. He can do that easily enough, for he has no fewer than five of them. And very nice girls they are."

It seemed to Geoffrey that this was a new indication that Leila did not care to be left much alone with Captain Byngham—a sign that his own case was not so very desperate after all.

That very afternoon an invitation was despatched to the

Misses Stoddart, and on the following day they arrived—two nice, frank, ladylike girls. Everybody at Seacombe Towers, Geoffrey Dundas more especially, felt that they were a great acquisition. They lent an air of ease and festivity to the house. They filled the vacant places at the table; and made the dining-room resound with their merry talk and laughter. They laughed at everything, their own poverty included. Papa had brought them up to do it, they said; and they gravely assured Geoffrey that it was by far the best way of lightening that burden.

"What is the use of grumbling because one can't have new clothes, or nicer food, or larger rooms?" said Emily to Geoffrey one afternoon as they were resting after a game of tennis. "It only makes the privations harder to bear. Of course, we should like to go to London occasionally, and—oh! there are many things of more importance than that!

But if you can't have what you want it is better just to try and think of something else."

"Upon my word, Miss Stoddart," said Geoffrey, "you are the first practical philosopher it has been my good fortune to meet."

Jane and Emily were always ready either for riding, boating, music, tennis, or whatever amusement was proposed; and best of all (from Geoffrey's point of view) the addition to the party made it much easier for him to get a few minutes with Leila now and then. He did not notice that on these occasions there was much less said than used to be the case when they were alone together. Geoffrey's supply of talk, usually plentiful enough, seemed to desert him whenever the much longed-for opportunities arrived. But happily Leila did not seem to notice that her companion's eloquence was not what it had been.

"Can you speak with me in the study for a few minutes?" said Sir Arthur to Geoffrey one morning.

"Certainly," was the answer.

"Don't let the others think we have made an appointment. Keep out of the way until they have settled down to their morning's amusement, and then come and tap at my door."

When Geoffrey presented himself in the General's sanctum, he found him pacing up and down the room. The young man had anticipated that

Sir Arthur had something to say to him respecting the danger which in a few days might be at hand. Nor was he mistaken.

"Sit down," said the General abruptly. "Do you remember, on the night you and I talked over that—that business, I said that I had asked you here mainly for a selfish reason—that I wished to increase the garrison?"

"Yes, I remember."

"What I had in my mind was this. Some weeks ago I had a letter from an old friend in India, a man high up in the Government service, introducing the Rajah of Nagore, who, my friend told me, was paying a visit to Europe. The introduction was one I could not disregard. I felt that it must be honoured, and that it would be necessary for me to invite the Rajah to stay here. But I could not divest myself of a suspicion that this visit would be found to coincide with the tenth day of June.

"I have done all I could to insure the visit taking place at a different time. But my plans have fallen through. I have a letter this morning from the Rajah asking whether I can receive him quite early in the month. It may be only a coincidence; but I confess it alarms me. I would give anything to put off the man, but I cannot do so without offending, and, in all probability, injuring my friend in India. The Rajah will be here—my guest, free to go and come as he pleases, with his own countrymen at his beck and call, on the tenth of June!"

"But, General, you will not permit this, surely? The danger is too great!"

"It may be purely imaginary," interrupted the General. "That is the worst of it. I have no shadow of an excuse to offer, either to the Rajah, or Lord —, or my friend in India, for shutting the door in the man's face. For that matter, he comes from a part of India a long way off from Churruckpore. But for aught I know some member of his train may be an emissary of the priests. They may even have arranged the time of the visit."



Resting after a game of tennis.

"At least, sir, have Miss Chetwynd sent to a place of safety," urged the young man, forgetting that he was allowing his anxiety for her to appear too plainly in his face.

"I cannot bear that she should be out of my sight," said Sir Arthur; "and fancy she may be safer here than anywhere else. Elsewhere she would be undefended; and I have an idea that those assassins strike first at the weakest and the most defenceless."

"Have you thought of any precautions that might be taken?" asked Geoffrey after a pause.

"The Rajah will probably have his own cook," said the General, "and I will take care that he does not have access to the regular kitchen. I will give a hint to the housekeeper and the cook, and tell the butler to open the wine in the dining-room, under my own eye. We must give no opportunity for anything like violence; and if necessary I shall not hesitate to tell the Rajah my story. I may be able to learn from his face whether he knows of it already. If he does he will understand that if anything happens to us while he is in the house he will be suspected. For myself, I mean to carry a revolver during his visit."

"I will do the same," exclaimed Geoffrey. "I will run up to town to-morrow and buy one."

"You needn't do that; you have only to help yourself," said the General; and opening the door of a closet he displayed a small armoury, containing a variety of firearms.

"What have you got there?" asked Geoffrey, pointing to a small black box which rested on a shelf by itself.

"That," said the General, with a queer look at his companion, "that contains a handful of jewels which I had snatched from the altar before the fusillade in the temple."

Somehow I have never cared to have them set. I might have sold them; but as the Seacombe property came to me soon after I left Churruckpore, there was no need. Would you like to see them?"

Without waiting for an answer, Sir Arthur selected a key that hung on his bunch, opened the box, and poured out its contents on the table. To Geoffrey, who knew little about gems, there was nothing remarkable about the stones, many of which were uncut. But there was one exception. This was an opal as large as a blackbird's egg, and marked by this strange peculiarity—it was black! That is to say, it was so dark that at a little distance it seemed perfectly black. Yet the usual iridescent colours—green and red, and orange, and blue were there, glowing in the black depths of the stone as if their light was fed by some invisible fire.

"That is a strange stone; I should think very valuable," said Geoffrey, taking it into his hand.

"Yes, I daresay," said the General.

To Geoffrey's surprise there was an uneasy look on the old man's face. He seemed disturbed until the singular-looking stone was returned and safely locked up.

"Do you share the common superstition about opals?" asked Geoffrey.

Sir Arthur turned aside the question without directly answering it.

"Choose your own weapon," he said, "and be sure that your cartridges fit."

Thus brought back to the business in hand, Geoffrey chose a plain but serviceable revolver, and carried it, along with a box of cartridges, up to his bedroom.

(To be continued.)



Poured out its contents on the table.



"**A**RRISE, marquise," said Louis XV., fervently, giving his hand to the young woman prostrate at his feet. "Your name lifts the latch of our hearts as of our door; we have nothing to refuse the daughter of one of our bravest servants, the wife of one of our highest noblemen. Speak boldly; what do you wish?"

"Sire," replied Mme. de Navaille, sorrowfully, but with firmness, "I implore your Majesty's permission to withdraw from the Court and to enter a convent."

"Withdraw from our Court where you have just arrived, to take the black veil of the religious order when the white marriage veil has scarcely slipped from your brow!"

"Might it have pleased Heaven never to have placed it there!" faintly breathed the poor woman.

"What are you saying, marquise? Have you reason to complain of M. de Navaille?" inquired the monarch, in a kindly manner.

"Less of him than of another, sire."

"Has anyone failed to show you due respect, madame?" replied the king, gravely, in a doubting, slightly ironical tone.

"My life has been broken, all my hopes of happiness blasted."

"Who has done this?"

"An august and sacred person, whose humble servant and subject I am—your Majesty."

"I!" cried the prince, with unfeigned astonishment. "How so, if it please you?"

"Alas, sire, by a word, a smile!" answered Diane de Navaille, with a touch of charming melancholy. "Kings are the reflection of God; as He, they give life—and death. Their admiration adorns beauty, their disdain adds to homeliness—and I am homely, sire."

"Oh, marquise!" gallantly protested Louis XV.

"I am homely! I know it; it is not my fault; could I have chosen my face, most assuredly I should have chosen one less disagreeable to your Majesty."

"But it is not disagreeable; on the contrary—"

"Your Majesty is too good! I am homely, it is a fact—"

"Debatable."

"But is it kind of your Majesty, so favoured by Heaven, to make me feel it so cruelly?" continued the complainant, not allowing herself to be disconcerted by this interruption.

"Such a thought is far from me, marquise, you have misunderstood—"

"No, sire."

"Then it is I who am in the wrong," said the monarch, smiling with a pleased assurance. "Let it be so! The guilty one is ready to make *amende honorable*. Make your complaint, Madame; but first of all be seated, since you are my judge."

Then, with that courtesy towards all women, beautiful or homely, duchess or work-woman, inherited from his ancestor, the king led the marquise to a chair and remained standing before her in the most respectful attitude.

II.

Mme. de Navaille had said truly: she was homely. But till the day of her presentation at Court this homeliness had offended no one, not even the one most interested in her, her cousin and *fiancé*, the handsome Roland de Navaille, officer in His Majesty's guards. Surfeited with the pretentious beauties of Versailles, whom he disdainfully qualified as so many dolls, he found a new pleasure in the little wild flower that grew for him in the shadow of the old Brittany *donjon*, thinking as little of comparing her features with other women as the eglantine with the rose.

Besides, Diane was lovable, *spirituelle*; she dressed with taste, and the harmony was so perfect in the setting that surrounded her that Roland readily gave his consent to a marriage long determined upon by both families, and led his wife to Versailles to present her to the king. It was on leaving this memorable presentation that the new marquise noticed a troubled scowl on the brow of her lord and master. For the first time he was sullen, disagreeable, even forgetting when leaving her to kiss the ends of her rosy fingers, the more unpardonable as Diane had a beautiful hand—dainty, slender, aristocratic, a really lovely hand—proving better than all the parchments in the world her right to the society of the Court.

"Wherefore this cloud in the clear sky of this radiant day?" Mme. de Navaille questioned herself vainly. All had passed off to one's heart's desire; her toilet was irreproachable, her manners, without a flaw, had merited the approbation of the Countess of Egmont, a former mistress of this difficult art; not a breach of etiquette, not a slip in the ceremonial. His Majesty had been perfect, his gracious words still echoed in the ears of the young wife:

"We congratulate you on your choice, marquis; it justifies your motto: *Oncques ne crains*. Mme. de Navaille will honour our house and our Court."

As a compliment—was it really a compliment? Why, then, had the old nobleman, the *Maréchal de France*, Richelieu, looked at her with so much scorn, as with a filip he scattered his snuff over his shirt front? Why had the king, noticing this look, suppressed an almost imperceptible smile? Why, catching the flying glance and smile, had Roland scowled?

III.

Alas! Yonder, in the depths of her own Brittany, Diane was only plain, at Versailles she was homely. This word falling, as was said, from a royal mouth had condemned the poor woman, and she bitterly regretted having come to the Court. With what a charming reception she had met? She had nothing to fear, neither rivalry, nor jealousy, nor back-biting, nor calumny.

"Mme. de Navaille is impeccable," solemnly declared the most viperous prudes.

"Navaille does not need to sleep with his ears open," grinned the young courtiers.

"Do not laugh, gentlemen; honour the unfortunate man's courage," repeated the Duc de Richelieu, cackling like an old dowager.

Some of these remarks reaching the ears of the marquis were acquitted at the point of his good sword. But the wound to his self-love was not so easily healed; he grew gloomy, sullen, reserved, and completely deserted his young wife.

Diane did not complain. Too proud to show her suffering, too brave to abdicate without struggle, too subtle not to divine

the cause of neglect, she went straight to the king and demanded a reckoning for her lost happiness with an audacity that amused and interested the monarch. Besides, if homely, Mme. de Navaille was endowed with piquant and expressive features, unusual keenness, added to eyes sparkling with malice, a smile of a demon and the voice of an angel. Her small body contained great self-assertion, knowing perfectly well what she wished and wishing it intensely. The king listened to his virulent accuser with great courtesy and some pleasure; humbly confessed his wrong-doings, and offered to repair them by punishing the refractory husband severely.

"Your Majesty would make me still more odious," sighed, somewhat hypocritically, the disconsolate Ariadne, "love is not made to order, and all your royal power would not suffice to bring back to me the heart your disdain has stolen from me."

"Perchance, marquise—Achilles' lance healed the wounds it intensely—and if you would but lend me some assistance—"

He told his plan; she listened, as perplexed and blushing as a young village bride.

"Your good taste will be questioned."

"The king's taste is always the best in the eyes of his courtiers," said the monarch with the philosophical irony of the celebrated. "After me the deluge. For my part I fear but one thing."

"What is that, sire?" ingenuously inquired the marquise.

"To burn my fingers playing with fire."

IV.

"I have a disagreeable communication for you, my dear marquis."

"I am at your Majesty's orders," replied M. de Navaille, the towers of the Bastille dancing before his eyes, as he had been called into the presence of the king after the long audience with his wife.

"A bitter sacrifice for a young husband—"

"Now we're coming to it," thought the marquis.

"—as much in love as you must be," calmly continued Louis XV.

Roland winced.

"I have just informed Mme. de Navaille of her appointment as lady of honour to my daughter-in-law. The Dauphine desires it unconditionally."

"Oh, sire! such an honour—"

"Deprives you somewhat of your wife, marquis, but we will find compensation for you; the first provincial regiment at our disposal will be put under your command—"

Roland left the presence of the king with more anxiety than he wished to acknowledge; the perplexity, the evident zeal of the monarch had not escaped him, and the favours falling so abundantly upon the heads of himself and wife moderately reassured him. Distracted, preoccupied, he pondered over the royal words. A compensation? For what? A regiment—provincial. Did they wish to be rid of him? Why? A fleeting idea passed through his mind: was it—Diane? Nonsense! Was it possible?

"My sympathy, Navaille!" said one of the gentlemen equerries, stepping up to him familiarly. "You come from the king looking somewhat sheepish. Has your wife recalled you back to duty—to the conjugal fireside?"

"You are far from the mark, my dear sir," returned the young man, assuming a careless manner. "On the contrary his Majesty has appointed the marquise as lady of honour to the Dauphine and promises me a regiment."

"Hear, hear, hear!" said the courtier, with a peculiar inflection, as he had already noticed with what particular courtesy the king had dismissed the fair suppliant.

"In any case, my compliments, my dear sir; you can but be satisfied."

"Charmed!" replied Roland in a funeral tone.

V.

That evening, as foreseen by His Majesty, the marked attention the king gave the new lady of honour was noticed by all; moreover, it became more pronounced day by day.

His eyes did not leave her, he chatted with her familiarly, laughing and joking like a young man. Diane returned his sallies with a spirit worthy of the Mortemarts, bringing to mind the celebrated favourite of the *Roi-Soleil*. The periwigs turned like so many weathercocks in the direction of the royal breeze.

Mme. de Navaille was soon the object of every eye, Dazzled by this new planet, even M. de Richelieu, so disdainful on the day of her presentation, recited to her his most flowery madrigals. The men, discerning in her a thousand unknown and charming attractions, the women a thousand frightful defects unperceived till now, biting their lips and disdainfully pouting, gave a sure guarantee to her triumph.

As to Roland, furious, vexed, he champed his bit in silence, trying in vain to pierce the circle of courtiers who surrounded her. She was his wife! By what right had they dared to steal his treasure? A furious temptation to snatch her from this crowd and carry her far, far away, penetrated his whole being. Was he forgetting his indifference, his disdain! The old love was born again within his heart. Diane was now in his eyes, as in those of all the Court, the most adorable, the most beautiful, since the king had distinguished her.

This punishment lasted an entire week, for the poor husband could not succeed in reaching his wife; he was obliged to restrict himself to ferocious glances, inordinate pantomimes, which seemed to amuse the marquise very much whenever she deigned to notice them. M. de Navaille tore his lace frills, beat his servants, lashed his horses. His vexation turned to rage; he accused Diane of ambition, of perfidy.

It was even worse when, one morning, he received his commission as colonel of the Dauphin, with an order to join his regiment immediately—at Strasburg! Astounded, he was yet obliged to receive the congratulations of his comrades; to thank the king, making the best of a bad bargain; to leave, after exchanging a simple good-bye with his wife, who replied to him by a gracious bow.

VI.

"Most assuredly, marquise, M. de Navaille does not love you as you deserve to be loved," said Louis XV., noticing Diane's dejection.

"Alas, sire, I fear it is so."

"And hope it is so."

"Oh, sire!"

"To submit so readily, to forsake such a heart as yours, is to undervalue its worth?"

"What could he do, sire? The commands of a sovereign must be obeyed."

"Nonsense, marquise! A man really in love braves all for the one he loves. Had I been M. de Navaille I should have wheeled about at the first relay and returned to Versailles."

"Your Majesty would, then, absolve him for doing so?"

"What, has he dared—?"

"I did not say that, but in case it should happen that—"

"On my honour, marquise, I do not know, for the temptation would be great."

"Your Majesty is jesting."

"No, madame, I am just as earnest as I am sincere."

"Let his Majesty recall his first impression, the true one!"

"I remember but one thing, and that is that you are adorable and adored!"

"Sire, you are making light of all this. Your Majesty promised me—"

"To return you to your husband on the first requisition; but he does not demand you of us, he leaves without looking back, without a word, without a letter. Let us profit by his negligence."

Diane opened her mouth to reply, but quickly bethought herself as she carelessly toyed with her ruff. She was a clever and resolute little body; if regretting her imprudence, and trembling for having thrown herself into the wolf's mouth, she dissembled her fear beneath a smile.

"Grace, sire. Permit me to await as many days for the return of Ulysses as Penelope awaited years."

"When this time is passed, and he does not return——"

"Then, sire, you may put me to the test—I shall be no wallflower."

"You are delightful."

"It will be fair play, will it not, sire? And if he returns there will be no Bastille awaiting him?"

"I swear it," replied the monarch with some hesitation, consoling himself with the words of the Duke de Guise: "He would not dare!"

VII.

The marquis had dared. Returning at full speed, he has succeeded in sending a note to his wife, begging her, in the name of his honour and his love for her, to accord him an interview. Kneeling at her feet, kissing her hands with the most tender protestations, he besought her to fly with him from the dangerous love of the king.

"But, my friend, you are crazy! The king loves me! I, so homely! I even doubted your love!"

"Do not doubt it, Diane! I love you; for you I would brave exile, prison, death. I love you!"

He meant what he said. Diane listened to him, laughing to herself at the mobility of human vanity. But, being a woman of as much heart as mind, she was indulgent, and allowed herself to be convinced.

The next morning, on rising, the king found a cleverly written note awaiting him, signed "Penelope," apprising him of the circumstances and reminding him of his promise.

"The little masquerader!" he exclaimed, "she has played us both a trick."

But as he was a good prince he pardoned the "pretty homely one."

M. de Navaille never suspected the truth.

The marquise, judging that discretion was the better part of valour, left him in ignorance, and was happy in his love for more than fifty years.

"Ha! ha! my boys," he would say with his cracked voice, "I was obliged to kidnap your grandmother from the late Louis XV., who was a *connoisseur* in pretty women and very much in love with——."

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THE ACCIDENT AT THE FOUNDRY.



WENTY years ago I was employed as an inspector of engineering work of various descriptions, chiefly connected with rail-ways manufactured in this country for export to one of the colonies. This occupation brought me constantly in contact with the production and working of iron in all its various branches and in many

different parts of the country.

At the time I refer to, a large contract had been placed with a firm in the North of England for the material of an important iron bridge, for the supervision of which I was responsible. This work included the casting of some heavy iron plates of rather complicated design for the caissons of the foundation.

The foundry where my plates were cast was a large open shop, a hundred yards in length and of great height. Across one end of it, at about fifteen feet from the ground, was an iron platform supported on columns, and the mouth of the "cupola," or melting furnace, which supplied this end of the foundry, was on a level with this platform.

In the centre of the platform was a deep bay or recess, to receive the casting-pot—a huge iron cauldron holding some eight or ten tons of molten metal. This was suspended by chains from a massive iron crane erected on the platform. The movement of the crane carried the casting-pot to and from the mouth of the furnace, and enabled it to be placed over any of the moulds within reach, so as to run the metal where required.

The next running was to take place in the early morning, before the breakfast hour, and the last thing at night I went round to examine the moulds and discuss our difficulties.

The manager of the foundry department, whom I will call Mr. Conyers, happened to be an old friend of many years' standing. He had been a foreman at the works in Sheffield where I served my time, and was an excellent fellow, for whom I had the greatest regard. After talking over the coming day's work with him, we went into a small office partitioned off at the end of the shop under the iron platform, and I made one or two sketches relating to the castings, after which we left the shop together.

"I am going down to Sunderland by the morning express for a couple of days," said Mr. Conyers. "Would you mind wiring to me if you want anything special?"

I assented, and shortly afterwards we parted.

The next morning, soon after six o'clock, I was again in the foundry, where a gang of men were preparing for running in the next charge for our plate-moulds. As the operation required prompt movement and separate attendance at each mould, they were standing round in a circle, each man ready to do his own part.

The blazing stream from the cupola was already filling up the great vessel hanging at its mouth, and the men at the crane were waiting to bring the charge out over the moulds. As soon as the furnacemen with their irons had lifted off one or two flakes of scum from the glowing surface, the casting-pot began to move majestically outwards through the recess, when a mishap occurred, of a kind, unfortunately, too well known in these risky operations.

On a small trolley, underneath the platform, there happened to be standing a long cast-iron rib belonging to some girder-work, which had been cleared from the mould, and was waiting to be moved away. Up to the moment of bringing out the present charge from the cupola, nobody had observed that one end of this rib, as it stood in the shadow, projected between the columns just far enough to touch the side of the casting-pot as it passed clear of the platform. It was but a matter

of an inch or two; but, as ill-fate would have it, just sufficient to tip the great pot forward on its pivot, and cause the weight of the molten mass inside to overbalance it.

The next moment the whole charge of seven or eight tons of liquid iron was poured forth in one tremendous cataract of fire upon the floor of the foundry.

Of course there was a frantic stampede among the men, every one of whom flung down his tools and made a dash for the far end of the shop. They most of them knew by terrible experience the common results of such accident—namely, that the damp sand of the floor usually causes the hot metal to fly explosively all over the place.

Luckily, although it had been impossible at a moment's notice to stop the crane, its comparatively slow movement had given everybody a chance of seeing what was going to happen, and therefore an opportunity of escape. I, who being specially interested in the casting had placed myself somewhat closer to the moulds than anyone else, sprang back at once with the same intention.

But at the very instant of doing so I saw before me a sight which, even at that moment of fearful peril, seemed to rivet me to the ground.

In the very middle of the veil of liquid fire, which for three seconds streamed from the tilted cauldron to the ground, I saw standing upright, and gazing with a fixed look of astonishment and dismay at me, the figure of George Conyers, the manager!

All power seemed to have gone out of my limbs. The thought thrilled through my brain that at that moment some dire catastrophe had overtaken him also on his journey, and that the mysterious coincidence of our fate had thus brought us in the spirit face to face.

I stood still, gazing at him in like manner; and before I could move again, a splash of the melted metal flew at me, struck me on the shoulder, and instantly burned through my clothes.

For a few wild paces I stumbled back once more; and, amid the agonising pain that followed, fell on the floor, fainting.

I remained unconscious for a considerable time, and on "coming to" found myself lying in an arm-chair in the counting-house, with several men around me, and a doctor at my side, whom I recognised.

"Where is Mr. Conyers?" I exclaimed, starting up as the light came back to me.

"Why, here, to be sure!" replied that gentleman, stepping in front of me, "and as hearty as anybody present at this meeting."

"Why—why?"—I muttered, sinking back again. "I thought you were going to Sunderland!"

"So I am," answered the manager, "As soon as we've cleared this mess up. But the express is at 8.30, and it isn't seven yet."

"Where were you?" I said, still hopelessly bewildered.

"In the little office under the crane, of course. I rushed out when I heard the shouting, and was nearly as scared as you were when I saw you staring at me over the moulds like that."

"I can't understand it," I replied, still half regarding him as a disembodied spirit.

"Why, bless the man!" said Mr. Conyers, with a merry laugh, "how many weeks have you been mixed up with the foundry trade? Have you been an iron-worker all these years and didn't know that clean molten iron, when it is quite liquid, is *transparent* like water? I was on one side of the stream and you on the other, and we saw each other *through* it!"

Such, indeed, was the explanation of the mystery, and with all my years of experience and powers of observation, I had never taken any note of this curious natural fact. But having, as I said before, had it brought home to me in the manner just related, I think the reader will agree that I am never likely to forget it.

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IN

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